

THE LESSER GOLDEN PLOVER *PLUVIALIS DOMINICA* IN NORTHEAST
AFRICA AND THE SOUTHERN RED SEA

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The Lesser Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* is not generally recognized as a non-breeding visitor to Africa (see, for example, The British Ornithologists' Union 1971). Below, I review the existing evidence from the Sudan, Yemen, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia and Kenya, to show that the species is an established visitor to eastern Africa, where, in Somalia, it occurs in flocks numbering over 100 birds.

SOMALIA

There are only six reliable records of Lesser Golden Plovers in Somalia spread over 100 years up to 1978. Two early records of the Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* have led to much confusion, and if they ever existed at all should probably have been referred to *P. dominica*. However, now they are no longer acceptable as either species (Mackworth-Praed & Grant 1941). The first of these records is included in Oustalet (1882) and noted by Moltoni (1936) as from "Somalia sett. Italiano?"; and the second is a record of *P. dominica* in Peel (1900), stated, apparently erroneously, by Archer & Godman (1937) as having been shot at Berbera (10°26'N, 45°02'E), and listed by them as *P. apricius* on the basis of its white axillaries.

The first definite Lesser Golden Plovers from Somalia were overlooked by Archer & Godman. A female was collected from a flock of about 12 at Berbera on 15 January 1897 (Phillips 1898), then Archer & Godman refer to a male shot at Berbera lighthouse (10°25'N, 44°59'E) on 20 November and a female at El Sheikh (10°28'N, 44°16'E), 94 km to the west of Berbera, on 29 January, but the years are not given. There is also a specimen in the National Museum, Nairobi, collected by M.E.W. North at Bander Beila (9°29'N, 50°48'E) on 10 September 1944.

Later, Lynn-Allen (1952) records a bird from Mogadishu (2°02'N, 45°21'E) on 28-31 December (year not given, but probably 1950 or 1951), followed by two 'next year' on 2 March, of which one was collected by M.E.W. North on 3rd.

I saw an adult bird still in partial breeding plumage at Gezira (1°56'N, 45°11'E) about 12 km southwest of Mogadishu feeding in a wet area round a well within 500 m of the seashore, on 4-6 September 1978. At a nearby tidal lagoon, largely surrounded by a belt of mangroves, a flock of 107 Lesser Golden Plovers was resting in shallow water on 24 February 1979; three weeks later on 15 March there were 101 in the same place. Not one was seen at the lagoon on afternoon visits on 7 January, 10 and 24 February, 20 March and 4 April.

Lesser Golden Plovers arrived again at the lagoon at Gezira in the following winter, the first being seen on 22 and 23 October 1979, followed by 61 on 6 January 1980 (seen with J.E. Miskell and Dr C.C.H. Elliott) and 10 on 15 January (seen with J.E. Miskell and J. Haslam). After this, numbers increased to at least 119 on 13 February and 138 on 20 March, then decreased to 105 on 1 April and 37 on my last visit on 9 April. Further south, on 29 September 1979, J.E. Miskell and I saw an adult in partial breeding plumage on a dirt road at 21 km south of Marerei (0°25'N, 42°42'E) in a large flock of about 500 Ringed Plovers *Charadrius hiaticula* and about 500 Curlew Sandpipers *Calidris ferruginea*. Such large numbers of Lesser Golden Plovers together would seem to be unprecedented in East Africa. The birds at Gezira were apparently feeding elsewhere and only came to the lagoon for water and rest. The closely grazed dunes provide feeding areas for large numbers of plovers, of which the Caspian *Charadrius asiaticus* is the most numerous, often in flocks of several

hundreds. Other plover species found in this habitat in smaller numbers include Spur-winged *Vanellus spinosus*, Crowned *V. coronatus*, Senegal *V. lugubris*, Grey *Pluvialis squatarola*, Ringed *Charadrius hiaticula*, Little Ringed *C. dubius*, Kittlitz's Sandplover *C. pecuarius*, White-fronted Sandplover *C. marginatus*, Mongolian Sandplover *C. mongolus* and Great Sandplover *C. leschenaultii*. However, the *P. dominica* always left the lagoon between 16:00 and 16:30 hrs local time and, rising high, flew off directly inland over high bush-covered dunes.

It was also interesting to notice at the lagoon that Grey and Lesser Golden Plovers mostly remained apart. The latter kept together as a rather close flock, with only one or two Grey Plovers joining them. Elsewhere on the lagoon there were Grey Plovers in small scattered parties, totalling 100-150 birds.

ETHIOPIA

Most of the earlier records in Ethiopia are from coastal Eritrea (Hemprich & Ehrenberg 1828-29, Kittenberger 1958, Madarász 1915, Moltoni & Ruscone 1944, Reichenow 1900-05, Smith 1955, 1957). These, taken together with his own observations, led Smith (*in* Moreau 1972) to conclude that the species was not uncommon in some winters from December to early May in Eritrea. I can add a record for Eritrea of a flock of 38 which I saw at Assab (13°01'N, 42°43'E) on 29 September 1974.

In inland Ethiopia, however, it is scarcer; I only saw it on four occasions, and there is also one other record, as follows: Lake Koka (8°27'N, 39°06'E): 3 October 1970 (1), 18 December 1970 (3) and 15-17 November 1974 (2) (Tyler 1974). Lake Abiata (7°37'N, 38°39'E): 18 January 1976 (1). Lake Adele (9°25'N, 41°57'E): 24 October 1975 (1).

YEMEN

I saw three birds on the shore just to the south of Al Hodeida (14°45'N, 43°00'E) on 31 December 1975. This seems to be the only record of its occurrence in Yemen.

DJIBOUTI

On my only visit to Djibouti (11°30'N, 43°03'E) I saw a flock of 21 Lesser Golden Plovers on the shore at about 5 km east of the town on 26 December 1975. I have been unable to trace any other records.

KENYA

Plumb (1978) in summarizing Kenya records lists only eight occurrences, of from 1-2 birds, all since 1961; and from countries to the south of Kenya, where he classified the species as a vagrant, he traced ten occurrences.

SUDAN

According to Smith (*in* Moreau 1972) the species occurs "sparingly" on the coast, while Cave & Macdonald (1955) are similarly vague, stating that records are few but that it is possibly "not uncommon as a non-breeding visitor, October to March, particularly in coastal districts".

SUMMARY

From the above, dated records range from 4 September (Somalia) to early May (Ethiopia), with records in all months between. In Kenya, although few birds are involved, it is now regarded as almost an annual visitor (Plumb 1978), and this is almost certainly the case in Ethiopia and Somalia, where observers are much scarcer than is *P. dominica*. In conclusion, it can be claimed that Lesser Golden Plovers, presumably all of the race *fulva*, are regular winter visitors to eastern Africa, with the largest numbers in the southern Red Sea, Gulf of Aden area, and southern Somalia coast.

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